Evidence Synthesis Infrastructure Collaborative (ESIC) planning process
Interim Report

Global SDG Synthesis Coalition (GSDGSC)
Building a Global Evidence Synthesis Community (BGESC)
Pan-African Collective for Evidence (PACE)
Center for Rapid Evidence Synthesis (ACRES)

Planning group 1: **Governance**
Stage 4 report: **Solution prioritization**
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SUMMARY

Growing global demand for trustworthy evidence to support better decision-making is an opportunity to raise the profile of evidence synthesis and mobilise new resources. Achieving this, however, requires more than technical improvements. Meeting the challenge requires effective organisational arrangements to deliver key evidence synthesis functions, supported by transparent and equitable governance mechanisms.

Governance should follow a core set of principles to drive transformation in the production, synthesis and use of evidence. These principles are: **Equitable oversight**; **Inclusivity and equity**; **Transparency and engagement; Responsiveness and adaptability**; **Standardisation and innovation**; **Sustainability and institutionalisation**; and Accountability **to the evidence community**. Governance should also be based on a principle of **subsidiarity**, that is decentralised governance is preferable, unless there are clear advantages to centralisation for particular functions. Governance should support achievement of **economies of scale** in evidence synthesis where possible.

A range of organisational structures could delivery core evidence synthesis functions and the solutions developed by ESIC Working Groups. These are conceptualised as:

1. A **Connector** – a centralised, externally-facing mechanism delivering key functions such as advocacy, strategy development, partnership development, communication and funder mobilisation.
2. **Participatory platforms** – decentralised externally-facing mechanisms that facilitate engagement between end users and the evidence ecosystem
3. **Core infrastructure** – centralised, internally-facing mechanisms delivering key tools, standards and methods.
4. **Engine rooms** – decentralised, internally-facing mechanisms providing technical support to regional or sectoral evidence synthesis initiatives

A range of possible governance models are possible to oversee optimal delivery of these functions and solutions. Key questions to consider when reviewing choices between different options include:

1. What level of centralisation is necessary? Should there be a central organisation to oversee delivery of connector functions? How to ensure that governance principles are embedded?
2. How should decentralised entities link to a centralised structure? As branches or as part of a network?
3. Should a central organisation be independent or hosted within another organisation?
4. What relationship should there be between the connector and core infrastructure roles (should this be a single entity, or separate but connected entities)?
5. Should decentralised entities have formal roles in governing a central entity?
6. How should interest holders (such as researchers, practitioners and citizens) be represented in the governance of central structures?
7. What role should funders play in the governance of evidence synthesis global entities?

Finally, we note that an interim governance structure will be needed after the ESIC planning period ends to support continued deliberation of these issues.

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1. Introduction

Rigorous evidence syntheses can be used by interest holders such as citizens, civil society, policy-makers and others to address global challenges, issues of injustice and exclusion, and to contribute to delivery of the Sustainable Development Goals. At present, however, the global evidence synthesis ecosystem is not as effective as it could be. It is fragmented, duplicative, and poorly coordinated. It continues to fall short in equitably including the priorities, voices, and participation of the Global South, marginalised communities, and underrepresented sectors. Many interest holders, whether decision-makers, practitioners, citizens, or regional organisations, remain disconnected from synthesisers of evidence. At the same time, there is considerable untapped potential to strengthen the system through better use of emerging tools, such as artificial intelligence and improved data-sharing methods.

With growing global demand for trustworthy evidence to support better decision-making, there is a unique opportunity to raise the profile of evidence synthesis and mobilise new resources. Achieving this, however, requires more than technical improvements. Meeting these challenges requires effective and transparent governance mechanisms based on robust principles, with a clear understanding of which functions governance needs to provide, and how this can be done.

This ESIC Governance Planning Group Stage 4 report provides some ways of thinking about these questions and develops possible models for future governance of evidence synthesis initiatives. The intention is not to prescribe a single solution, but to present practical frameworks and decision points to guide future deliberation. These models should help build capacity in underrepresented regions in the Global South, where infrastructure and access to evidence synthesis remains limited, and in sectors where evidence synthesis is less well developed.

The report has been informed by a series of weekly Governance Planning Group (GPG) meetings which discussed governance models and approaches, drawing on the wide experience of the group. The GPG core group also met with other working groups (WGs) to discuss long-lists of solutions, and to explore linkages to governance models or structures. Meetings were also held with a selection of organisations with relevant governance models and experiences to build understandings of key issues and the benefits and challenges associated with different approaches (see Annex 1).

2. Review of key governance principles and assumptions

Good governance should ensure organisational and ecosystem alignment with strategic outcomes and impacts. In developing governance recommendations the GPG has prioritised the following design principles: 1. **Equitable oversight** – where leadership, decision-making authority and resource control are shared across geographies, sectors and identities, and not concentrated in dominant institutions, and global power structures are rebalanced by centring the Global South in agenda-setting and decision-making; 2. **Inclusivity and equity**, where diverse geographies are represented and where individuals and communities from historically under-represented and marginalised groups, across regions, disciplines, sectors, and social identities, are meaningfully engaged and able to shape institutions, decisions, agendas, and outcomes; inclusivity will also need to address inter-generational justice. 3. **Transparency and engagement,** where governance and decision-making are open and accountable; 4. **Responsiveness and adaptability**, where governance is forward looking and able to address emerging needs; 5. **Standardisation and innovation**, where best practices and common frameworks are balanced with methodological and technological innovation, in ways that are inclusive; 6**. Sustainability and institutionalisation**, where governance fosters financial, operational, and institutional sustainability, creating lasting infrastructures that help embed synthesised evidence into policy making structures around the globe. 7. **Accountability to the evidence community**, where governance strengthens

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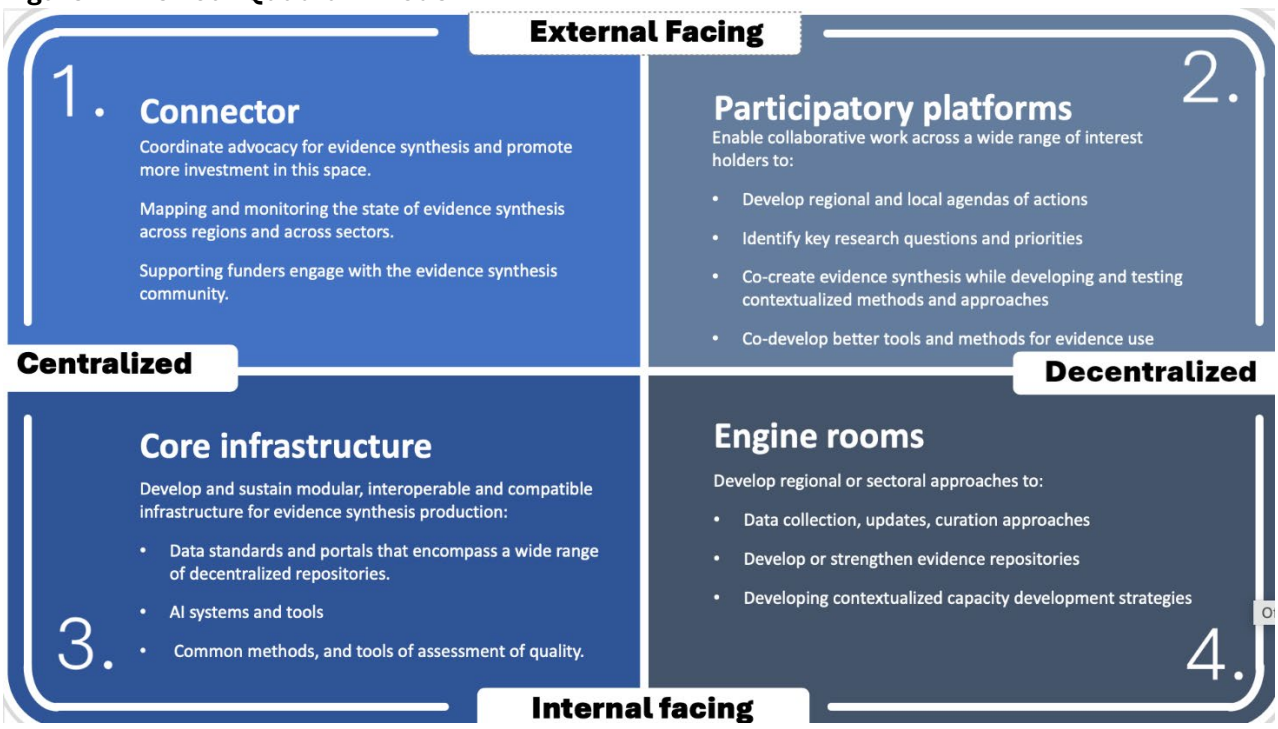
independent oversight of evidence synthesis functions by members of the evidence ecosystem, including citizens. These principles should shape the design and operationalisation of evidence synthesis governance.

Governance should also follow the **principle of subsidiarity**: centralisation is only desirable for tasks that cannot be effectively delivered by decentralised structures. Central structures should also work with regional and technical entities to support local ownership and impact. It also desirable for governance to support **economies of scale** across delivery of evidence synthesis functions.

3. Functions of a future evidence synthesis ecosystem: a four-quadrant model

We propose a four-quadrant model to aid considerations about the functions that a future evidence synthesis ecosystem will need to cover, and how governance can support delivery of functions (Figure 1).

Figure 1: The Four Quadrant Model



Overarching functions for each quadrant are described in the graphic. The specific functions in boxes 2, 3 and 4 in particular will be determined by the final recommendations proposed by the five ESIC Working Groups. Some functions will be provided by several quadrants, for example, advocacy which would be a core function for the connector but also provided by participatory platforms.

3.1 Connector

The connector undertakes external-facing functions within the evidence synthesis ecosystem. Its purpose is to strengthen relationships across the ecosystem, advocate for the value of evidence synthesis, and to serve as a bridge between evidence producers, users, funders, and sectors that may be underserved or underrepresented. It also helps link global synthesis efforts with emerging needs, funding opportunities,

and policy agendas. While the connector may require technical or regional expertise, its leadership can be centrally coordinated, provided it is accountable and inclusive.

Functions of the connector include:
Advocacy: Promoting the value and visibility of evidence synthesis in decision-making.
Communications: Coordinating consistent messaging and language across the ecosystem.
Coalition-building: Facilitating strategic partnerships between evidence producers, intermediaries, users, and funders.
Funding mobilisation: Coordinating support for under-resourced tasks and strategic priorities.
Intersectoral and interdisciplinary engagement: Connecting work across disciplines and policy domains.
Linkage facilitation: Strengthening relationships between local and global actors.
Priority setting coordination: Facilitating shared decision-making around where evidence synthesis efforts should be focused.
Strategic initiatives: Convening high-level collaborations around ecosystem development.
Monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL): Coordinating MEL at the ecosystem level.

Many of these functions may be undertaken jointly with other quadrants.

Alignment with governance principles
Equity: The connector can address historic imbalances by locating leadership or secretariat functions in the Global South and supporting underserved regions and sectors. Importantly, the connector must remain inclusive and not be dominated by any one sector.
Legitimacy: Requires transparent leadership selection and inclusion of citizen voices to build trust.
Transparency: Should publish operational plans, and governance processes publicly. Mechanisms like rotating panels and open consultations can support this.
Adaptability: Needs a clear mission with limited scope to avoid "mission creep". Should evolve based on ecosystem needs.
Sustainability: Helps reduce duplication, foster alignment, and encourage interoperability. Must coordinate with others, and not duplicate roles.
Accountability: Must focus on coordination, communication, and facilitation—not control. Should be accountable to the broader evidence synthesis community, with mechanisms such as public reporting or peer governance.

Key considerations
Risks of elite capture or sectoral dominance: this could be addressed by requiring representation from multiple sectors and geographies and embed Global South actors in governance.
Duplication or fragmentation: Coordinate closely with other quadrants and aligning with regional and sectoral initiatives.
Tokenism or weak legitimacy: Include citizens and marginalised actors in decision-making, and implement meaningful feedback mechanisms.
Over-centralisation: Maintain a facilitative, not managerial, role, and co-develop agendas with decentralised actors.

By fulfilling these functions thoughtfully, the connector function could facilitate building a more equitable, effective, and cohesive evidence synthesis ecosystem.

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3.2 Participatory platforms

Participatory platforms are decentralised mechanisms that facilitate engagement between a wide range of interest holders within and across the global evidence synthesis ecosystem. Platforms may take digital, institutional or in-person forms and may be regional, national, or sectoral in scope. These platforms need a high degree of decentralised leadership because contextualisation is critical, including understanding of policy processes and spaces for citizen engagement, and to help develop trust with users. Examples include regional and sectoral platforms to promote and increase evidence use.

Alignment with governance principles:

- **Inclusion**: The platforms should engage underrepresented groups and ensure local and sectoral voices are heard in agenda-setting. These platforms must not rely on 'voluntary engagement'. Sustainability and equity require suitable funding arrangements. Hosting arrangements may be one way to address this.
- **Transparency and engagement**: Provide a legitimate and visible pathway for interest holder influence. Token consultation with regional and sectoral interest holders can backfire, so clear mechanisms for decentralised platforms to influence central processes may be needed (linking to the connector function).
- **Responsiveness**: Actors need to see the impact of their input and involvement in the processes. Feedback mechanisms across sectors and geographies should be considered.
- **Accountability:** Offer a mechanism for holding the connector, evidence institutions and other decision makers to account.
- **Equity:** Prevent extractive participation by ensuring that engagement is not merely symbolic or one-sided. This requires dedicated funding mechanisms to support the full and sustained participation of marginalised groups; capacity-strengthening efforts to ensure all participants can contribute meaningfully regardless of language, education, or institutional affiliation.

Key Considerations: Capacity development support and funded participation and engagement will be key and require careful consideration. Socio-cultural differences shape how citizens engage with platforms, which can be exclusionary, even inadvertently. Proactive measures are needed to address this.

3.3 Core infrastructure

Core infrastructure are foundational technical systems, tools, standards, and coordination mechanisms that underpin high-quality, coherent, and interoperable evidence synthesis across the global evidence ecosystem.

The core infrastructure would benefit from a higher degree of central coordination to encourage convergence of systems and standards, efficiency gains and economies of scale (although it is noted that there are risks with convergence if it privileges knowledge systems from the Global North over others). This core infrastructure could have multiple groups or organisations delivering different functions. There would be a need for coordination across infrastructures (such as standards, tools or data-sharing mechanisms). Trustworthiness and flexibility to respond to rapid change and emerging needs across regions are also important. In areas such as standard setting, inclusiveness, cognisance of implementation capacity, and flexibility for implementation in different contexts are important.

Alignment with governance principles:

- **Innovation vs standardisation:** The core infrastructure must be prepared to consider evidence beyond that produced by dominant institutions or models or sectors, and support co-production

with citizens and other interest holders. There is a need to balance coherence with openness to new approaches, co-production and locally grounded methods.

- **Sustainability:** Core infrastructure may be least appealing to funders, so it is often under-resourced. Core infrastructure can help reduce duplication of effort through better coordination.
- **Accountability:** Inclusive/community review mechanisms will be required.
- **Equity:** Governance must prevent dominance by well-resourced actors; technical standards should reflect diverse knowledge systems. Apply equity-focused frameworks to ensure that standards, tools, and data infrastructures reflect diverse needs and capacities. Open access approaches and FAIR principles should be utilised to drive inclusion.

Key considerations: Even though this is a centralised function, it is proposed that this is a modular infrastructure with shared ownership, and not centralised ownership or control

- It will be important to ensure that these solutions facilitate coordination and collaboration among decentralised processes.
- Builds upon decentralised engine rooms (see below, instead of the other way around to promote ownership and buy-in).
- Peer-led quality assurance (without becoming too onerous).
- Avoid centralising control but ensure that the infrastructure sustains good information flow.

3.4 Engine rooms

These organisational functions are internally facing to the evidence synthesis community, as with the core infrastructure. However, they require a decentralised approach because their aims relate to: enhancing capacity in new places and sectors; accessing and organising evidence and data from many places; and ensuring that tools, methods and data-sharing approaches are appropriate to regional and sectoral contexts (noting that sectors and regions need further elaboration). These engine rooms can engage with other interest holders, but the primary objective is that there is internal coherence in how functions are addressed. Examples include: regional or sectoral teams promoting synthesis standards or data interoperability.

These functions require significant decentralised leadership and ownership to materialise, as well as resourcing, and creative approaches to ensure sustainability .

Alignment with governance principles:

- **Institutionalisation**: There is a risk of fragmentation if engine rooms are only project-based.
- **Responsiveness**: Should be driven by local and sectoral priorities.
- **Equity:** Ensure that regions and sectors historically excluded from global technical standard-setting can shape methods and data practices.

Key considerations:

There is a need for support for engine rooms to consider optimal levels of decentralisations, balancing decentralised accountability and contextual relevance with economies of scale and effective interoperability.

What is the relationship between the quadrants?

Many interdependencies and potential synergies are identifiable across the quadrant. For example, a strong connector function will create support for the core infrastructure that the evidence synthesis ecosystem needs. Effective participatory platforms can be showcased by the connector function to demonstrate what robust decentralised evidence ecosystems can achieve. The participatory platforms can draw on the outputs of the engine rooms, and so on.

In terms of organisation, broadly there are three main ways the quadrants could be connected. 1. They could be part of a single overarching organisation. 2. Organisations providing the functions could be part of a loosely connected network, sharing information and all committed to a broadly similar vision, or 3. there could be something in between – coordination mechanisms and agreements with differing levels of governance complexity. Which models are most appropriate is a matter for deliberation and will involve trade-offs. A process for assessing governance options is discussed in more detail in the next section.

4. Governance Decision Processes

The quadrant framework identifies the range of ESIC functions that any governance model will need to address. In this section, we identify options for different governance models, and link these to a set of decision points.

One key decision for the evidence synthesis community will be **whether to support the creation of a centralised organisation or secretariat** to undertake the connector functions. This entity could take many forms: hosted or independent; networked or centralised. It could emerge as a new institution or evolve from an existing one by expanding its remit. If a centralised organisation is chosen, then various options are possible (see Table 6 below). A light touch network of interest holders could be governed by a steering committee, perhaps rotating key functions. The network might share information, undertake some advocacy work, and seek to ensure that a high-level set of evidence synthesis objectives are met.

It is possible, however, that such a light touch organisation may not have enough resources or capacity to rise to the challenges of supporting or governing a high-quality, equitable, socially-relevant evidence ecosystem. To achieve these objectives, some kind of secretariat may be necessary. This secretariat could be based in the Global South, it could cover all connector functions, which could include supporting other organisations to meet identified evidence ecosystem needs. This could include liaising with funders to bring in resources for key tasks. The organisation might be something like a federation or a membership organisation. The Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data is one model, where there is a dispersed secretariat, strong, dynamic collaborative leadership, a range of member organisations, and strategic support from a board with high-profile members, as well as technical advisory support. Crucially, any central organisation leading the connector function must uphold subsidiarity- doing only what cannot be effectively done by decentralised actors- and must be held accountable to the broader evidence synthesis ecosystem. Its leadership must be collaborative, trusted, and capable of building bridges across sectors and regions.

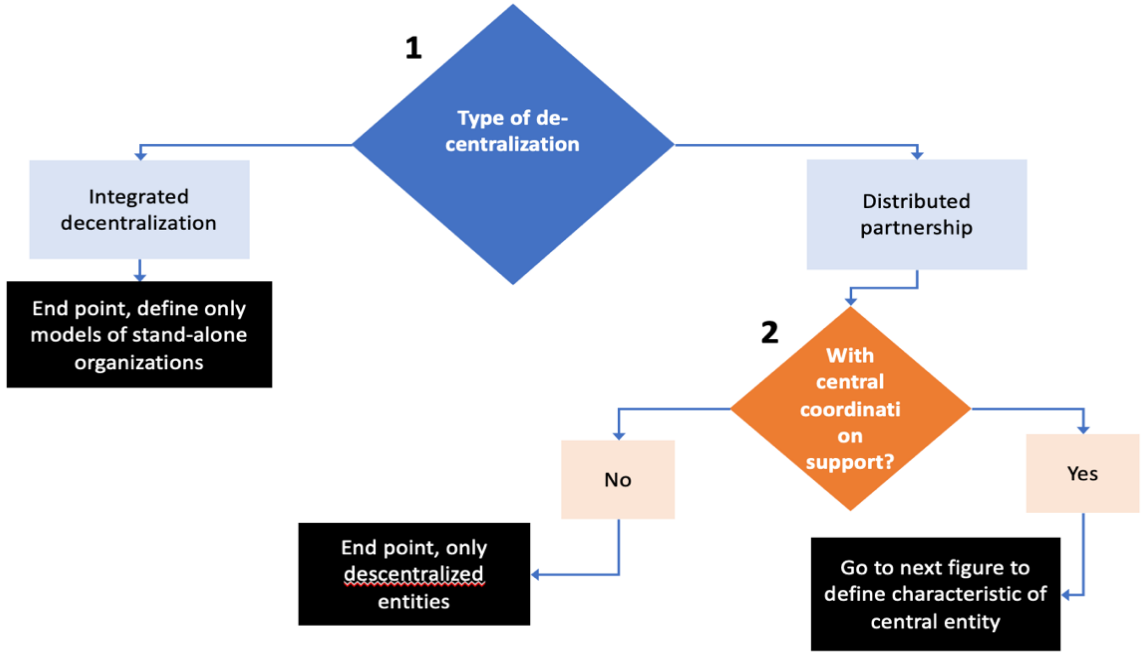
Another starting point for thinking about future models is to begin from the perspective of decentralised entities. These decentralised actors could be evidence intermediaries, regional evidence synthesis organisations, or those working in a particular sector. These entities might be either integrated branches of a central coordination unit, or independent entities. As independent entities, they may need to decide how to engage with central coordination. If independent evidence synthesis entities do engage, they need to consider several questions– who engages, what types of governance representation are appropriate, whether central coordination should be hosted or independent, whether technical and non-technical functions are separate, nested or integrated, and what capacity is needed to cohesively address connector functions.

These decision points are not binary, and **hybrid governance models** are both feasible and desirable. The goal is to enable strategic coherence without stifling local ownership or innovation, and to create a

governance structure that is both fit for purpose and accountable to the diverse evidence synthesis community it seeks to serve.

Issues for deliberation A. Model of decentralisation

Figure 2: Decision model



A review of the solutions currently being developed by the WGs shows very diverse solutions emerging in terms of content, regional focus, sector focus, and possible implementation modalities. This suggests significant decentralisation is required. From this starting point, the two initial questions that should be addressed relate to: 1) the type of decentralisation and 2) if a central coordinating entity is needed.

1. **What type of decentralised model is chosen?**

Table 1: Integrated Decentralisation or Distributed Partnership

Model	Advantages	Challenges	Examples
Integrated Decentralisation Regional and/or sectoral structures are *affiliated branches or offices* of a single global entity, operating under shared systems, brand, and oversight but with local autonomy.	• Tighter alignment • Standardisation • Brand consistency	• Can seem imposed or extractive • Branches may duplicate other decentralised initiatives • Risks overlooking local context • Vulnerable to central overreach	• Multilateral organisations such as WHO • CGIAR System
Distributed Partnership Decentralised work is delivered by independent partner organizations who co-own and co-govern the initiative's goals through formal agreements.	• Builds on local legitimacy • May build on existing capacities • Empowers (regionally) rooted organisations if decentralisation is regional • More adaptable to diverse governance cultures	• Coordination is harder • Quality assurance and alignment may vary • Slower to align around shared priorities	• Global Partnership for sustainable development data •

If the **integrated model** is selected, it implies that a single organisation model has been chosen. If the distributed partnership is chosen, then the discussion continues with the second question.

2. **Should there be central coordination and support?**

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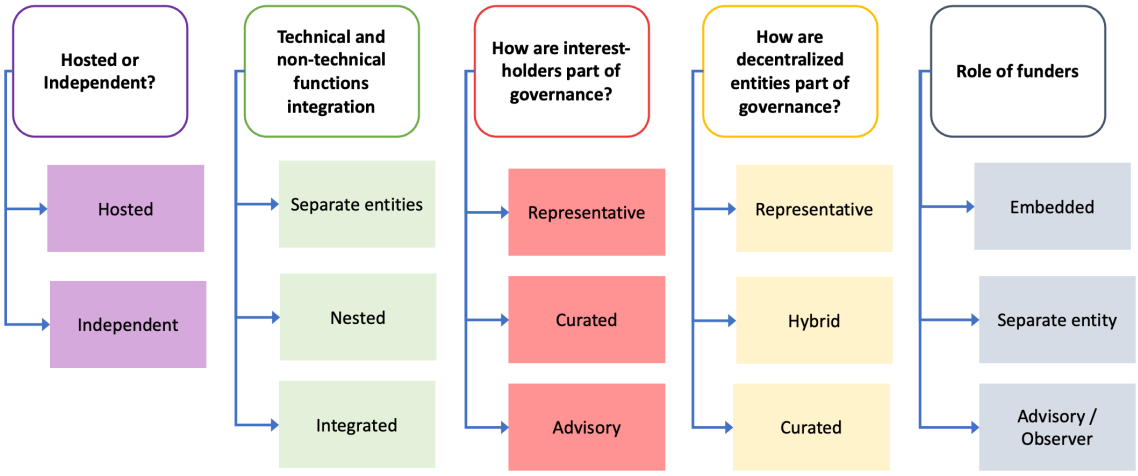
If a **fully decentralised model** is chosen then there will be a risk that connector functions will not be provided (such as supporting collaboration, and reducing fragmentation and duplication), which will need to be addressed. If **coordination support** is selected, then there are at least five important dimensions to consider regarding the central coordinating entity.

Issues for deliberation B: Choices if a central coordinating entity is deemed necessary

Figure 3: Decision points in relation to central coordinating entity



3. Should this organisation be independent or hosted within an existing organisation?

Key considerations for this question are as follows:

Table 2: Hosted initiatives and independent organisations

Criteria	**Hosted Initiative** e.g. Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data at the UN Foundation	**Independent Organisation** e.g. Open Government Partnership
Set-up	Faster	Slower
Administrative Overhead	Likely lower	Likely higher
Flexibility	Could be low or high depending on level of engagement of the host, and conditions placed on hosting	Medium
Autonomy	Limited (host may set constraints)	Full independence
Governance	Does not require a board with fiduciary responsibility; other areas of responsibility for the initiative would need to be determined	Requires a board with fiduciary responsibility; or Steering Group
Risk Profile	Could be high risk if there are issues with the host; but lower risks related to not establishing a new organisation	May be higher risk as new organisation, harder to dissolve
Legitimacy	Leverages host reputation, although there are risks if the organisation has problems or if the host demands a high level of control in return for hosting, or if the host is seen to be too aligned with one particular evidence synthesis sector	Builds own credibility
Conflict of Interest	Host decision must account for potential COI	Independent

4. What should the relationship be between the connector and the core infrastructure?

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The quadrant identifies two centralised functions, one externally and the other internally facing. These could be provided by the same organisation, or by one organisation nested in another, or by two or more separate organisations. There are advantages and disadvantages to each, related to transaction costs, risks of misalignment, whether it is realistic for one organisation to manage so many functions, and which kinds of arrangements will be most equitable and legitimate for evidence synthesis interest holders.

Table 3: Different models for linking the Connector and the Core Infrastructure

Option	Advantages	Challenges
Nested model: Core infrastructure within connector organisation, with semi-independent governance	• Integrated strategy • Shared operations • Allows to differentiate different types of leadership needed (connector more networking or political leadership) and core infrastructure more technical and specialised	• Roles may blur • Overreach concerns from Connector over technical issues may arise • Need clear rules on financing arrangements across the two bodies
Unified entity: Single organisation governs both under one leadership structure	• Streamlined coordination	• May dilute focus or overload entity • Leadership requirements in technical and leadership terms may be hard to find in one person • If only one board more complex, given the range of functions it would need to cover
Distinct entities: Separate organisations lead each function, with coordination mechanisms.	• Specialisation • Clear roles	• Higher costs • Risks of misalignment • Risks of underfunding one aspect

5. Should decentralised entities have formal roles in governing the central entity?

This could be a **representative model** – which would create ownership and stronger control over the global connector, and strong accountability for any secretariat. This model would require organisation of decentralised structures and may take time to implement. It may constrain the actions of any global secretariat. It could be **independently selected (**by whom and on what basis would need to be determined). This would be less complex to organise, could mean that high level people with a strong advisory role are chosen. The downside might be weaker connections to decentralised structures. It will require additional mechanisms to engage decentralised structures. **A hybrid model** – this could secure the best of both worlds but may be difficult to manage and may not make for efficient decision-making.

6. How should interest holders (e.g., researchers, practitioners, citizens) be represented in the governance of central structures?

Different models are possible – elective, curated and advisory. These are discussed below. It is noted that term limits are important to avoid concentrating power in incumbents and to ensure organisations keep focused on their mandates:

Table 4: Different models for interest holder engagement in governance structures

	Advantages	Disadvantages	Other considerations
Elective model:	High levels of legitimacy, and accountability to stakeholders	May be complex to operationalise. It could	Interest holders may not be well organised to nominate representatives, or participate

Interest holders nominate or elect representatives to governance bodies. e.g. Research Data Alliance		become politicised or exclude less organised groups.	in elections, creating serious legitimacy risks
Curated model: Board with diverse representatives selected through nomination or committees. e.g. Global Partnership For Sustainable Development Data	This model may be well suited to addressing EDI issues and may be more manageable than an elected model.	It may be perceived as top-down, dominated by familiar networks, and risk being seen as unaccountable to core constituencies if not carefully designed.	Management would need to be transparent to address these risks. Would need to agree who nominates, and which committees.
Advisory model: interest holders engaging, but not governing directly	Relatively simple to organise and would allow many to engage.	The weakness is that there may be limited real power to influence decisions, and this may limit trust and engagement.	This model may be good for early stage engagement or need to be paired with other mechanisms.

One option would be for an organisation(s) represented within the connector and/or hosting the connector to host **a technical panel** or panels on key technical issues such as AI, standards, data sharing and so on. These would liaise with a diverse set of core infrastructure organisations. A connector organisation could employ one or more people with a suitable technical background and able to understand the landscape and engage with a range of organisations on key evidence synthesis technical issues.

What level of capacity is need for a Connector organisation?

Table 5: Connector organisational models

Global connector organisational models	**Advantages**	**Disadvantages**
Light touch model	Lower cost; easier to set up	May lack legitimacy, as could be driven by existing dominant organisations and likely end up excluding new, less-established (but necessary) actors
Higher capacity model	Better able to advocate for evidence synthesis globally; to map out and stimulate action on key tasks, and contribute to reduction of sector fragmentation	Requires more funding; some established actors may not see necessity for this organisation and may not be supportive, which would need to be negotiated

A further question and set of options regarding the role of funders within governance models is included in Annex 2.

5. Interim governance planning structure

To conclude this report, it is noted that following the Cape Town meeting an interim governance planning structure will be needed to provide further advice to funders and other interest holders, and convene future governance deliberations. How this should be organised and its remit will be reviewed further in future meetings.

ANNEX 1

External interviews on governance models

Organisations and individuals consulted included:

The Jacobs Foundation, ESRC UKRI, UN system GPG members, the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data, Open Government Partnership, the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR), the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and What Works Climate Solutions.

We recognise that further consultations will be needed in future, especially with organisations from the Global South, to better understand governance models that can address asymmetries in power, funding and agenda setting. Insights from these meetings helped to inform the overall approach and the models that are discussed in the report.

Key insights from these interviews include:

- **Governance needs to reduce fragmentation** without concentrating power or alienating key diverse actors
- **Early design decisions matter-** legal structures and country agreements shape long-term reform flexibility. (Some arrangements may lock-in the initiative in the future).
- **A balance is needed** between centralised coordination (for scale, coherence, legitimacy, and investment) and decentralised responsiveness (for contextual relevance and to get the work done)
- **Hybrid models** with modular governance may offer more flexibility and adaptability than rigid hierarchies
- **Avoid overly complex matrix structures,** which create administrative overload and blur accountability
- **Establish functions before structure**: ensure the central body provides clear, valued services rather than just oversight
- The principle of subsidiarity should guide design: central bodies should perform only those functions that cannot be effectively delivered at regional, sectoral, or levels.

ANNEX 2

What role should funders play in the governance of evidence synthesis global entities?

Alternative models and their challenges, benefits and implications are presented in the table below. It is noted that guiding principles and good practice could be developed for funders including on engagement processes that prioritise Global South-led agenda setting and co-creation of funding strategies.

Table 5: Funders and evidence synthesis governance

Model	Benefit	Challenges	Implications
Embedded Funders have formal governance roles in central structures.	• Aligns funding (of those on board) with strategic goals • Builds funder confidence • Can stabilise long-term investment of those on board.	• High risk of dominance or perceived control • May deter ownership from Global South or civil actors or key interest holders without funding capability. • Conflicts of interest may arise • Less likely to attract funders in the current context • No new funder may join once the process starts, unless they can alter/modify the process.	• Aligns priorities and funding • Risk of over-influence • Requires funders buy-in
Separate Platform Funders form a coordination forum that engages with the Connector and other organisational structures in an organised way.	• Preserves autonomy of implementation and funding • Enables funder dialogue and alignment • Encourages strategic coherence	• Requires coordination mechanisms	Requires funders buy-in
Observer/Advisor Funders participate in non-voting advisory or observer roles.	• Maintains engagement and insight • Retains power of implementers to reach a variety of funders • Low conflict of interest • Allows trust-building over time	• Funders may feel disconnected from decision-making • Harder to align funding with governance needs	• Maintains open dialogue • Limited alignment • Less structures needed to begin with.